

## **CLOSING STATEMENT**

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On behalf of the student organizing committee we would like to express our gratitude to all of you: speakers, participants, students and professors.

Your support and presence have made this event possible. We want to tell you how delighted we have been to share this experience with you.

This conference has been the sixth annual humanitarian conference organized by Webster Geneva. For us it has become by now almost a tradition: we are grateful to all the organizations and experts and friends in the humanitarian area whose encouragement and support and participation allow us to continue, in fact to start again every year.

For us, Webster students these conferences have a special meaning. They allow us to organize a "real" event, with all the excitement, all the hopes for success and fears of failure. Even more, however, they allow us to share with the members of the humanitarian community their ideas, their experience and their preoccupations. For us, this is the real learning experience.

Why do many of us at Webster study migration and refugee issues? We feel that to study humanitarian issues is a privileged way to learn about the human predicament,

This conference was held on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1951 Geneva Conventions on the status of refugees.

International migration remains an enormously diverse issue, which encompasses many kinds of human movement associated with a variety of forces and motivations that have very different causes and consequences. As we know, throughout history, migration has played a key role in shaping the modern world. It has not only been a force of change and progress to the community but also to individuals.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has been marked by important migratory movements affecting the whole world, with a special toll on European countries. Since the end of the cold war, Europe has been subjected to increased flows of refugee and asylum seekers due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the disintegration of Yugoslavia. The bloody and bitter conflict in the Balkans produced the worst refugee crisis on the continent since World War II, where it has been estimated that 950,000 persons arrived in Western Europe from Yugoslavia since 1991.

European countries therefore feel assaulted from these new refugee influxes and have therefore undertaken efforts to restrict entry by tightening border controls, strengthening immigration laws relating to illegal aliens and reforming of asylum legislation. There is also a widespread

agreement that these efforts of European policies on asylum and immigration, will have an important impact on further developments in this field which was indeed the topic of this conference: *Europe, Refugees and International Migration*.

Some of the reasons why we study refugee and humanitarian issues is to have a better understanding of the needs and basic rights of people, who have been forced out of their homes into unknown and harsh environments, which we feel requires more than feelings of sympathy, but actual education, training and necessary actions to help assist them out of their situations.

Let us conclude by quoting Eugene Kulischer, writing in 1943:

*"The migratory movement is at once perpetual, partial and universal. It never ceases, it affects every people... [and although] at a given moment it sets in motion only a small number of each population... in fact there is never a moment of immobility for any people, because no migration remains isolated."*

For us, organizing this conference was a great experience; the dedication of the people involved has demonstrated the ability and willingness of people to share responsibilities and co-operate with one another. It gives us immense pleasure that you were able to be a part of the program and that it was a success. Thank you for coming!